



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
**REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL**

DATE ISSUED: **July 9, 2008**

REPORT NO: **08-101**

ATTENTION:

Ad Hoc Fire Prevention and Recovery Committee

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: **Park and Recreation**

SUBJECT:

Status Report on the Park and Recreation Department's  
Brush Management Program

COUNCIL DISTRICT(S):

All

CONTACT/PHONE NUMBER:

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REQUESTED ACTION:

This is an informational report only. No action is required on the part of the Committee.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Of the 24,655 total acres of open space managed by the Park and Recreation Department's Open Space Division, 1,180 acres are located within 100 feet of a structure. Among other duties related to open space management, the Division is responsible for thinning brush for fire protection in accordance with San Diego Municipal Code Section 142.0412

(<http://docs.sandiego.gov/municode/MuniCodeChapter14/Ch14Art02Division04.pdf>)

and Fire Prevention Bureau Policy B-08-1

(<http://www.sandiego.gov/fireandems/pdf/brushpolicy.pdf>).

Although the Open Space Division is ultimately responsible for thinning brush on the land that it manages, homeowners and their contractors can obtain right of entry permits to conduct brush management on City land.

The Municipal Code requires brush management to occur within 100 feet of structures where native or naturalized vegetation occurs within this distance. The regulations refer to two "zones", Zone 1 and Zone 2, occurring within the 100 feet. Zone 1 is a typical back yard, generally 35 feet in width, often located on private property, and may be landscaped with irrigated ornamental vegetation. Zone 2 extends out from Zone 1 generally 65 feet in width so that the total width of Zone 1 plus Zone 2 is 100 feet. While Zone 2 may be located on private property or on land owned by a Homeowners' Association, all of the Open Space Division's work occurs on City-owned and most of this land is in Zone 2. Beginning in 1989, the City's Landscape Regulations have required new developments to accommodate brush management on their sites, i.e., not on public land.

Although records show the City's budget for brush management efforts increased after the Normal Heights Fire in fiscal year 1988, a typical/average budget for the effort until fiscal year 2008 provided for the thinning of approximately 70-acres per year. The FY 2008 budget included \$1,036,412 for brush management, with a goal of thinning 210-acres on parcels identified by the Fire-Rescue Department. The Division met the goal in mid-April and thinned 266 acres of vegetation, removing 570 tons of vegetation, at the end of the fiscal year.

To date, the Division has prioritized brush management sites on the basis of “grid values” assigned to City parcels by a model prepared and run by the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department. In partnership with Fire-Rescue’s update of the City’s Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map, the Division will receive a list of newly prioritized parcels from which work will be scheduled in FY 2009. Once the list is received, anticipated in July, 2008, the Division will post a schedule of work locations on the Department website. A report on the map revisions may be viewed at: <http://docs.sandiego.gov/reportstocouncil/2008/08-064.pdf>.

The City’s FY 2009 budget for brush management on Open Space Division-managed land has increased dramatically to \$3,124,615. This funding will provide for the thinning of 590-acres during the year. The increase in monies has been augmented by the award of three Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grants totaling \$2,362,812 for use in Carmel Valley, Scripps Ranch, and Del Cerro. Furthermore, Congressman Bilbray, 51<sup>st</sup> District, has an appropriation pending before the full United States Senate and House of Representatives for an additional \$1 million for the City’s brush management program. If approved, this funding may be available for the FY 2010 budget.

Starting with the release of the Mayor’s Proposed FY09 Budget for the brush management program, staff has been proactively working to have the funded program in place effective with the new budget on July 1.

Historically, the Division performed the brush thinning program with a combination of City staff and the supervision of contracts with non-profit organizations such as the Alpha Project, California Conservation Corps, and the Sycuan Golden Eagles. With the increased funding, the Division will increase the funds toward these contracts as well as develop additional contracts for Biological/Archaeological consulting services and Landscape contracts. These contracts in combination with the ten additional City laborers will provide for a comprehensive program with the appropriate oversight and training to ensure the brush management program is done in the most effective and efficient manner, while consistent with all applicable federal, state, and local regulations. Full staffing is expected to be in place by late summer/early fall of 2008.

#### FISCAL IMPACT

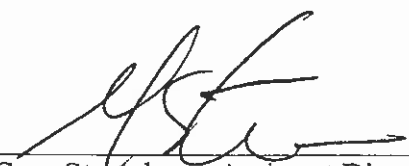
The Fiscal Year 2009 budget includes \$3,124,615 for brush management from the General Fund. The City has been awarded grants to offset \$2,362,812 in brush management costs over a period of two years.

#### PREVIOUS COUNCIL and/or COMMITTEE ACTION:

None.

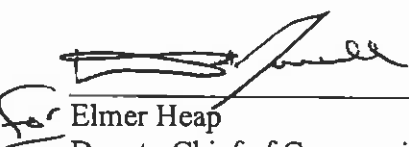
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS: Park and Recreation staff works with stakeholders via the Open Space Canyon Advisory Committee. In addition, Development Services and Fire-Rescue have brush management outreach programs.

STAKEHOLDERS AND PROJECTED IMPACTS: Proper implementation of the brush management regulations will reduce wildfire risk for those living near the wildland/urban interface and will minimize environmental impacts for those interested in maintaining wildlife values.



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Gary Stromberg, Assistant Director  
Park and Recreation Department



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Elmer Heap  
Deputy Chief of Community Services